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A New Model within Canadian Colleges and Universities to Develop a Diverse Future Generation of Entrepreneurs: Inclusivity and Accessibility

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Abstract

This paper reviews past research that focused on the delivery of, and support for, entrepreneurship education (EE) within the Canadian post-secondary academic environment. Specifically this review focuses on the trend towards EE 'inclusivity' within both the Canadian post-secondary system and the individual institutions examined. A wide range of studies is reviewed and impacts are categorized across key stakeholder groups. This paper concludes with insights for future research specific to other key stakeholders and provides examples to highlight academic institutions that have established EE experiences both within and outside the curriculum to satisfy a broad and diverse student population.

Methodology

This review was focused by the following question: What impacts, if any, does an inclusive model of EE have on key stakeholders within the Canadian post-secondary academic environment? For purposes of clarity, 'inclusivity' is defined further in the analysis section and encompasses multiple dimensions including program discipline and business stage. A structured methodology was utilized to first review the existing literature on EE. A subsequent search for resources followed which targeted more specific and current literature directly related to the trends sought in the research question.

The search for articles and reports was conducted in two stages. First, relevant electronic databases for research were searched (ERIC and Business Source Complete returning the vast majority of potential sources). The key words used individually or in combination in the search included: entrepreneurship, entrepreneur, entrepreneurial, education, access, higher, post-secondary, and trends. Second, the author conducted a review of reference lists found within the articles selected. A priority for inclusion was established, with emphasis on literature that met key criteria. First, only literature focused on the post-secondary environment was included. Second, articles with quantitative analysis were given priority for inclusion, but qualitative items with strong relevance to the research question were considered.

A total of 23 journal articles and reports were selected and reviewed. After the initial review, a final number of 19 sources were selected for inclusion in the analysis. The results from the review were analyzed using a meta-synthesis approach. The author did experience challenges in finding abundant literature to support the research question. The availability of resources may have also related directly to the access attributed to the author, which consisted of the online and physical library resources available at the time of writing. Most of the literature referenced in this paper has origins in a Canadian, and minimally U.S., context but also used sparingly are supporting references from European literature.

Review and Findings – Introduction

Background

An important trend in Canada is the emerging significance that Canadian colleges and universities have to support and promote successful new business creation. New business formation in Canada, and the subsequent growth of these ventures, continues to provide significant growth for the economy. Self-employment accounts for almost 40% of newly created jobs in Canada each year, and small enterprises in Canada (less than 100 employees) represent 98% of total businesses and employ 48% of the workforce (Industry Canada, 2012). As most net new job growth in the economy comes from start-up firms (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013), it has been established that entrepreneurial behaviour in general is critical to financial sustainability and also to the fabric of our society (Winkel, 2013). One key challenge that exists within the small business sector is the prominent failure rate of new firms in the first years of operation. Over 30% of new businesses in Canada will not survive their first year – which has motivated the creation of government-funded programs and incentives to encourage successful new business development, focused specifically towards current and future entrepreneurs. Much of this programming is driven through EE and associated services on Canadian college and university campuses, which play a key role in improving the success of new businesses (Regan, 2009). The Canadian federal government recognizes the importance of supporting young and new entrepreneurs and providing them with required skills and supports is critical to developing Canada's global competitive advantage (Industry Canada, 2010). This, in part, has led to the proliferation of EE found on campuses from coast to coast.

The State of EE

Once considered an extra-curricular service offered by post-secondary institutions in Canada, EE is now widely recognized as an academic discipline. Over the past six years, there has been a substantial increase in EE programs offered across Ontario's college and university sector (Sa et al., 2014). The trend also extrapolates to the Canadian higher education landscape, where there is significant growth in EE within both universities and colleges. In 2014, there were 33 formal EE programs in Ontario universities alone (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013).

The pervasiveness of these initiatives can be traced to many origins, but new social and economic pressures on Canadians have raised EE to the forefront, and it is difficult to identify a college or university in Canada without at least one course within the discipline (Sa et al., 2014). As the number of Canadian institutions offering EE rises, so too does the variety of courses and the choice afforded to students (Winkel, 2013). The number of courses offered at Canadian universities grew from 72 in 1979 to 446 by the year 2008 (Sa et al., 2014). It is important to note that this growth is not specific to the Canadian academic landscape. Around the globe, similar forces are acting upon many industrialized nations, motivating an expansion of educational offerings available to future entrepreneurs. In the world's second largest economy, well over 5,000 U.S. college and university courses are now offered

each year in the field of entrepreneurship, serving over 400,000 students (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2013).

Another trend within this discipline is the emergence of new and innovative EE learning opportunities to which students can be exposed. In the province of Ontario, EE is in a state of flux and evolution with respect to the various program options available. There is an emergence of diversification within the field, which combines offerings from both curricular and extra-curricular parts of the campus (Sa et al., 2014). Canadian higher education as a collective has been proactive in developing EE strategies to meet the needs of students. Over 60% of Canadian institutions surveyed claim they have a strategy in place to deliver EE programming to students (Industry Canada, 2010). Of those institutional survey respondents, 98% are active in providing EE on campuses through one or more course-based, credential-based, or extra-curricular formats. Specifically, the highest participation rate is found within extra-curricular offerings (Industry Canada, 2010), where many innovative and effective entrepreneurship learning opportunities - such as contests, competitions, and boot camps - are found (Winkel, 2013).

A Trend toward Inclusivity

In the past, most EE outcomes have been delivered within the business schools of colleges and universities – and the curricular emphasis has been on business skills (Katz, Roberts, Stroom, & Freilich, 2014). Historically, student entrepreneurs acquired knowledge to support new ventures, and typically studied and graduated from either the business or engineering faculties. This traditional model served those specific students well, but excluded those students from other academic disciplines and, in some cases, those with diverse demographic backgrounds and learning needs (Leger-Jarniou, 2012).

The goals of modern EE have shifted away from that of venture creation only and now also encompass the development of behaviours and skills necessary to support new business formation (Industry Canada, 2010). This trend followed a global recognition that EE concerns a wide range of disciplines and sectors – not exclusively that of the business sector (Leger-Jarniou, 2012). It is now customary to see participants in Canadian programs from a wide variety of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, as colleges and universities in Canada recognize the importance of various student groups not previously seen as traditional entrepreneurship students. Since entrepreneurs are self-employed and represent a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines, the education is now taught across these disciplines (Katz et al., 2014).

As a result, an emergence of cross-campus models is evident, where the concept of interdisciplinary education is introduced in the field of EE (Katz et al., 2014). What was once only offered within the business school exclusive to students in that faculty, there is now evidence of entrepreneurship provided in various discipline-specific programs and offerings. This promotes new types of learning, where new opportunities can be exploited and creativity and risk-taking can be practised as part of decision making (Council of Ontario

Universities, 2013). These new models have also emerged in response to a broader range of available marketable skills, where new business start-ups are considered significant drivers of regional innovation and economic growth (Duval-Couetil, 2013).

Structurally, it is evident that a supported trend is EE that is available beyond the business school (Katz et al., 2014). Although the majority of institutions in Canada still offer their programs traditionally through the faculties of either business or engineering (Industry Canada, 2010), there is visible change in the sector. One of the largest changes seen in EE over the past 20 years has been structural – the move from a concentrated, singular location to a multi-faceted operation found in various areas of the campus (Katz et al., 2014). In Canada, a 2010 survey revealed that 28% of responding institutions sought to achieve the delivery of EE to students in all faculties (Industry Canada, 2010). Along with these changes goes a wider interpretation of EE on campuses – which encompass different and diverse academic disciplines (Abreu & Grinevich, 2013). This is further illustrated by examples from various U.S. universities and colleges which have developed innovative and collaborative models to support entrepreneurship. These include the delivery of degree and non-degree programming, entrepreneurship centres, student living environments, international partners and outreach (Center for International Private Enterprise, 2014). Specific Canadian examples will be explored later in this report.

Inclusivity in Entrepreneurship Education

Earlier in this report, ‘inclusivity’ was defined contextually as an approach to describing post-secondary EE that provides access to students, or non-students, regardless of academic discipline, personal background, or stage of venture development. It is important to further expand on this definition and references to inclusivity found in the literature, as student access to EE is much broader than the singular definition of their academic faculty or program.

Inclusivity in EE can be defined by the type of person accessing the program or offering. Since the composition of students offers significant heterogeneity (Maritz & Brown, 2013), one must consider age, membership in groups, socio-economic and demographic backgrounds as components of access (Maritz & Brown, 2013). Location of the student must also be considered, as in Ontario both classroom and experiential models of EE are offered across venues in both populous urban centres and remote communities (Sa et al., 2014). Program access can be measured by the breadth of cultures to which they appeal (Osiri, McCarty, & Jessup, 2013) as well as international aspects, diversity and gender specificity of the program (Maritz & Brown, 2013).

Programs can be measured based on the sectors which they serve and the roles of their constituents. A campus which promotes inclusive EE is one where all fields can cross-pollinate and various sectors of the real-world economy are represented (Center for International Private Enterprise, 2014). Accessible programs promote initiatives that foster the creation of new

businesses by students, and also alumni and other members of the community (Sa et al., 2014).

Inclusivity can be measured across the differences in institutional type. In Canada, there is a clear distinction between colleges and universities and their mandates. For the delivery of EE, differences exist in the structure and delivery of student offerings. Specifically within the province of Ontario, a larger number of EE courses are found within Ontario colleges compared to universities and more entrepreneurship opportunities are found outside the business faculties as well (Sa et al., 2014). Ontario college diploma programs, which by definition are more accessible in terms of entrance requirements than university degree programs, host the majority of entrepreneurship programming (Sa et al., 2014). Furthermore, Ontario colleges offer a broader range of academic opportunities in the field than their university counterparts, which put more emphasis on fundamental programming including principles-based courses, business plan creation, and small business concepts (Sa et al., 2014).

The degree of accessibility to EE within an institution is highly influenced by the type of programming that is offered. Within various Ontario university faculties, student options are vast and include majors, minors, concentrations, options, foci, specialties, and a variety of non-degree offerings (Sa et al., 2014). Most of these university-based programs are still resident within the business or engineering faculties (Sa et al., 2014). Modern programming has evolved to include offerings considered within, parallel to, or outside the core curriculum: incubation, competitions, workshops, co-ops, internships, mentorships, residences, workspaces, awards, speaker series, and networking events (Sa et al., 2014). Each of these offers varying degrees of access to the participating students on campus. Institutions have also enhanced inclusivity of their offerings by making them available through non-traditional formats and campus locations such as student associations and clubs (Leger-Jarniou, 2012), as well as the establishment of entrepreneurship 'hubs' connecting students, entrepreneurs, and business owners in the community. This provides another service to entrepreneurship students outside of standard curricula (Sa et al., 2014).

An important stakeholder for institutions is the student committed to, or in the process of, building a new venture. Within Canadian institutions, examples exist that include, and appeal to, students regardless of their stage in new venture development (Gorman, Hanlon, & King, 1997) as well as provide supports to later stage ventures with an emphasis on enablement and launch through the services of business incubators and/or accelerators (Dalziel, 2012).

The final dimension of inclusivity examined within this analysis is the teaching and learning process utilized by the institutions. An accessible EE initiative seeks accessibility not only in program design, but also in the nature of content, pedagogy, and assessments (Maritz & Brown, 2013). Assessment in particular is of importance as institutions must appeal to students across the continuum of business start-up – from awareness to launch – and match

the assessment to various components of the process (Duval-Couetil, 2013). This requires careful planning on the part of the institution, which must achieve a wide range of outcomes that can be described as skill-building through to knowledge-based. (Gorman et al., 1997). In achieving multiple teaching and learning processes to ensure a rich curriculum that appeals to a heterogeneous student group (Maritz & Brown, 2013) a consideration of learning styles is necessary – which can directly affect the “entrepreneurial propensity” of the audience (Gorman et al., 1997). Within the analysis of the available literature also emerged three distinct clusters of thematic findings which are detailed according to the following categories: impacts to the student, impacts to the academic institution, and impacts to the community.

Impacts to the Student

There is evidence to suggest that students benefit from EE programming that is accessible across various dimensions. Recent increases in the amount of institutional infrastructure available to EE students in Canadian post-secondary education are significant. Not only are increased classroom supports available to enhance student accessibility, but new sources of support outside of classroom EE programming include new structural approaches, resource allocation, new funding sources, new teaching methods, extracurricular opportunities, and innovative evaluation methods (Industry Canada, 2010). The inclusive trend provides an environment to better encourage EE and student participation regardless of the development stage of a student venture. New approaches which encourage accessibility can enhance awareness of entrepreneurship among students (Leger-Jarniou, 2012). By pursuing an interdisciplinary and open approach to EE, institutions can better provide students an entrepreneurial perspective which can be developed (Kuratko, 2005). For aspiring entrepreneurs, the discipline is most effective when it takes a broad, pragmatic and rational approach to business (Kuratko, 2005).

Labour statistics support a significant concentration of self-employed entrepreneurs within fields outside those traditionally associated with business graduates (Katz et al., 2014). To support this trend, accessible EE and its changing pedagogy responds to market changes. These new and interdisciplinary programs seek to develop new programming for non-business students – specifically for art, engineering and science – where context and authentic examples are paramount (Kuratko, 2005). Universities are increasingly offering EE in a greater number of subject areas relative to their college counterparts, which permit students to enrol in courses outside their home faculty (Industry Canada, 2010). These interdisciplinary approaches offer enhanced learning for students that includes skill-building, career awareness, idea protection, and success factors for readiness at various stages of venture development (Kuratko, 2005).

Impacts to the Academic Institution

Following the trend to offer inclusive EE within the college or university has significant impacts upon the broader institution. The commitment to pursue EE presents both benefits and challenges across three distinct categories: structural, teaching and learning, and competitiveness. The very

nature of accessible EE challenges the traditional structure of the college and university, which is predominantly a self-contained model (Katz et al., 2014). The division of academic disciplines into organizational faculties or schools makes effective accessibility of EE a challenge (The European Commission, 2008). In Canada, strategic policy and planning for EE at the institutional levels are sparse, and these tasks generally reside at the divisional level – usually under the authority of a faculty dean (Industry Canada, 2010). Colleges and universities must show flexibility in design and be open to non-traditional models that incorporate both curricular and extra-curricular activities that appeal across disciplines (Sa et al., 2014). Various elements of infrastructure, resources, teaching methodologies, and outreach must be considered to support an inclusive EE environment (Industry Canada, 2010). Not only is there a need for accessibility at the faculty and institutional levels, but also the need to extend cooperation and mobility outside the walls of the campus with local enterprises (The European Commission, 2008). Since innovative and viable business ventures are likely to arise in our modern economy from technical, scientific, and creative studies, institutions face the challenge to build inter-disciplinary EE approaches to support an accessible environment for students (The European Commission, 2008).

If executed with precision, an institution's EE initiatives can be used as a competitive tool versus their peers (Maritz & Brown, 2013). These institutions must understand the needs of their market, and recognize its diversity, as this can be measured across several dimensions of socio-demographics, venture stage, and program type (Maritz & Brown, 2013). If delivered with success to a broad segment of students, EE teaching and learning may be established as a key line of differentiation for the institution (Sa et al., 2014). In addition, the breadth of appeal of EE programs can have impacts on future funding opportunities. EE programs are recognized as having the potential for significant sources of funds for a university or college – from both within and outside the institution (Kuratko, 2005). An institution's approach to accessibility and degree of inclusiveness may change how EE is funded within that institution (Industry Canada, 2010).

Transition to a more accessible approach to EE has far-reaching impacts on the process of teaching and learning and in particular on the demands placed on delivery by faculty and staff members. Although EE experience is not recognized as being a key prerequisite to teaching entrepreneurship (Industry Canada, 2010), the field does demand adoption of new and innovative approaches if the desired effect of outcome achievement is to be attained. These approaches generally promote action, and must take care not to stifle the entrepreneurial qualities or desires of students through traditional teaching methods (Leger-Jarniou, 2012). EE presents a unique opportunity to engage students in action-based and experiential learning, where experience building is critical (Winkel, 2013). However, this goal presents complexity for the faculty member who is tasked with providing these curricular opportunities, often in teams, in a creative environment with a diverse population of students. At the faculty level, the move towards inclusivity in EE and a multi-disciplinary approach challenges traditional pedagogy and assessment methods (Duval-Couetil, 2013). This presents an

additional layer of complexity in design and consistency across programs given the heterogeneity of the target audience (Maritz & Brown, 2013). An additional challenge in assessment exists in attempting to fit this diverse audience with non-traditional outcomes and requirements (Duval-Couetil, 2013). One last challenge is presented to faculty and staff in ensuring an accessible EE standard. In providing some of the most common programming in EE such as business plan and product competitions, commercialization and internship opportunities, there is a common goal to make the situations as real-world as possible (Duval-Couetil, 2013). This presents a twofold challenge to faculty and the institution. Providing a real-world experience to a diverse set of students with multiple perspectives is one challenge, which is compounded by evidence to suggest that the work, in most cases extra-curricular, is often left to be done by very few within the institution (Sa et al., 2014).

Impacts to the Community

The impacts of EE can be broad and far-reaching. Recognized in this context as the collective external stakeholders to a college or university institution, the community is one group with clear benefits to gain from emerging accessibility in EE programs. Benefits fall into one of three categories: collaborative, economic, and networking.

The community benefits from new forms of EE that emerge utilizing new models such as incubation and acceleration – where early stage companies are supported, at least in part, by the institution. As these opportunities for collaboration have been established across new discipline areas (Regan, 2009) new project opportunities have developed which benefit local businesses, governments and other groups across various disciplines (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013). Although there are classroom and curricular opportunities emerging which reach into the community space, much of what benefits the community is found at the extra-curricular levels. An accessible approach to EE through extra-curricular initiatives embraces the participation of non-students, which can include both alumni and local community constituents (Sa et al., 2014).

Economic benefits to the community are also apparent in the literature. As EE promotes offerings through multi-disciplinary approaches, the success of these diverse entrepreneurs will help regional, national and global economies to succeed. (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013). In establishing a culture of entrepreneurship across the campus, universities can leverage this as the single most important factor in generating economic gains from their broad entrepreneurial activities (Osiri et al., 2013). An accessible EE program also helps to establish and maintain a sense of community within and outside the campus structure. An inclusive approach to EE can create an advantage in establishing a network of partners (Leger-Jarniou, 2012). This establishment of valuable networks provides a critical inflow of ideas and entrepreneurial talent from and into the community across diverse disciplines (Maritz & Brown, 2013).

Implications for Future Research

Despite the fact that much of the research on EE is current and has been written in the past five years, the areas specific to access and associated impacts are largely untapped and yield considerable opportunities for future work.

First, review of the literature in this paper uncovered considerable evidence and awareness of the importance of inclusivity to the discipline. In the process, a number of barriers to this goal were identified. A Canadian report illustrated that the efforts of few, funding challenges, and lack of strategic integration pose obstacles in promoting student access to EE (Industry Canada, 2010). Other contributing factors include issues of location, available financing opportunities, capacity, market access, and specific issues related to particular minorities or special interest groups (Center for International Private Enterprise, 2014). Further attention to these barriers and empirical attention to the cause and effect relationships of these factors could yield valuable insights into future access and benefits.

Various examples from the literature reference the effective models of EE that achieve exemplary results across a wide variety of measures consistent with institutional objectives. Some of the models discussed include a holistic approach to university EE (Katz et al., 2014), and various other proven academic models and approaches that could be newly applied in the field of EE (Katz et al., 2014). Other ideas are introduced, including successful models from outside Canada, specifically the implementation of inter-disciplinary teams to promote student exposure outside the core curricular studies on campus (The European Commission, 2008). However, these models do not directly emphasize student accessibility as a future desired outcome. As these models are explored in future research, a valuable insight would be how they directly impact the program stakeholders and the significance of the impacts. Further, a more detailed assessment of the returns on investment by governments and other funding organizations on accessible EE initiatives could be measured.

Conclusions and Leading Practices

The reports and articles reviewed provided valuable insights into impacts and influences of an increasingly accessible trend within EE. In spite of a broad literary range of approaches in subject and scope, distinct key themes emerged. A key conclusion of the literature review is that the trend toward inclusive EE does impact a range of stakeholders in a variety of ways. The three prominent sets of stakeholders are students, the academic institution, and the community.

Student. At the core of EE is the student, where trends of accessibility encourage increasing levels of awareness of entrepreneurship opportunities (Leger-Jarniou, 2012). At a Canadian level, universities offer EE in a greater number of subject areas than in the past, and are likely to permit students to enrol in EE courses outside their faculty. An abundance of entrepreneurship centres have emerged on Canadian campuses that connect students with valuable resources and services to enable entrepreneurship (Sa et al., 2014).

A model by which students gain accessibility to EE resources independent of their field of study has been enabled in the province of Ontario through the On-Campus Entrepreneurship Activities (OCEA) and Campus Linked Accelerators (CLA) programs (Sa et al., 2014). Administered through the province's Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE), these funded programs encourage the growth of entrepreneurship excellence on Ontario campuses, and shared across campuses. Key program objectives include an emphasis on creating focal points on campus for entrepreneurs and exposing students across disciplines to the principles of entrepreneurship ("Ontario Centres of Excellence," 2014). One successful example enabled by the OCE program is the LaunchPad at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) in Waterloo, Ontario. Within this program, students across all disciplines can earn course credits while participating in the creation of a new business. Across the WLU campus, a course in entrepreneurship is also offered within each faculty which can then be applied within the LaunchPad (Sa et al., 2014). The result is a campus initiative supporting student ventures across fields and development stages, where over 30 enterprises currently operate (Sa et al., 2014).

Academic Institution. As trending towards a more accessible discipline of education emerges, so do the pressures on the academic institution to provide the environment to stimulate and enable quality EE programming – both within curricular and extra-curricular experiences. It is recognized that the traditional structure of the college and university, where organization by division/faculty/school is the norm, is a barrier to encouraging flexible structures to promote quality EE (The European Commission, 2008). Although the statistics favour a positive trend for accessibility of EE in Canada, empirical research continues to show that there is room for improvement. Less than one-third of institutions surveyed in Canada had a defined objective to deliver EE in all faculties (Industry Canada, 2010). Where great strides have been made over the last decade, there is more that can be done to encourage EE activities and outcomes on a broader campus level (Industry Canada, 2010). One specific example illustrating effective EE programming across the traditional campus and course structure is the Startup Garage initiative housed at the University of Ottawa. Outside of the standard semester system, both university and college students from the Ottawa area can spend a summer working to accelerate their businesses. Free space, contact networks, and business advice are all offered as part of this program (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013). A parallel initiative within the university is an entrepreneurship certificate, which is offered to any student across any program area (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013). These examples show modern thinking to raise the accessibility of students to EE across traditional boundaries.

Community. Another group of important stakeholders to campus EE programming is the institution's broader community. An inclusive approach to EE on campus provides quality opportunities for collaboration on projects which benefit not only students, but also local businesses, governments, and other stakeholders across various disciplines (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013). As EE initiatives become more pervasive across Canadian campuses, a diverse set of models and approaches is evident. One recognized trend is

the establishment of linkages and inclusion to a variety of groups traditionally considered as external to the college or university campus. However, an accessible approach to EE offers collaboration opportunities, where quality extra-curricular initiatives embrace participation of a wide range of non-student groups that include alumni and local community members (Sa et al., 2014). One unique example of this trend is found within the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre at Georgian College in Barrie, Ontario (“Georgian College,” 2015). Also funded in part by the OCEA program, this centralized campus entrepreneurship ‘centre’ seeks to provide a range of EE opportunities to students across its various campuses in Central Ontario. Georgian will also extend its reach beyond the campus to provide and promote EE services to a variety of groups including local small business owners, armed forces personnel stationed locally, and local aboriginal residents (J. Pickard, personal communication, January 19, 2015). This forward-thinking inclusion of local groups provides valuable services to the community that would not otherwise be available.

This review identified and reviewed impacts of an increasingly inclusive model of EE across the Canadian post-secondary academic environment. Although room for further development of accessible EE does exist, the literature identifies positive trends and impacts found across multiple Canadian stakeholder groups including students, the college and university, and the broader community. Although more research is warranted to further explore the future implications of these trends, there is concrete evidence to suggest that educators who adopt an inclusive approach to EE can expect positive results to justify future funding and exploration within the discipline.

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